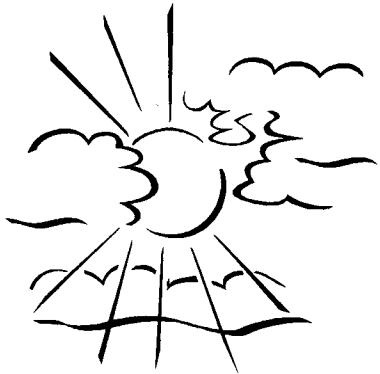


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Wednesday, October 12, 2005

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Gas bills to rise 46% this winter, state says

Heating costs to jump an average of \$59 a month

By Stefanie Murray
Lansing State Journal

October 12, 2005

Furnaces around the Lansing area are pumping out heat lately as overnight temperatures dip into the chilly 30s.

But you might want to opt for an extra blanket before kicking the thermostat up any more - or else plan to have less cash to spend for the holidays.

Here's why: Natural gas prices are soaring, and winter heating bills will spike an average of \$59 this year to \$187 a month for the typical Michigan home, the state's Public Service Commission warned in its annual energy outlook. That's a 46 percent increase from winter 2004-05 and higher than preliminary estimates.

Increased demand, rising prices and the double wallop that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita dealt to Gulf Coast oil production are why winter heating is going to be so expensive, commission Chairman Peter Lark said.

"This parallels what's been happening in the national gas market," Lark said. "With supply down and demand up, prices have increased dramatically."

Nearly 80 percent of Michigan homes are heated with natural gas. The main cost protection consumers have is to use less.

The commission - as well as utilities such as Consumers Energy, the largest local supplier of natural gas - are advising residents to save energy and money by "winterizing" their homes. Caulking, weatherstripping, insulating and turning the heat down a degree will help lower gas bills.

"We haven't had that one cold day yet, where people start saying 'I need to get that fixed,' " said Jim Raynak, owner of Okemos Ace Hardware.

"It will affect us all around - in a good way that (people) will buy more weatherstripping, and bad because they won't have the excess money to spend."

Michigan is in better shape than other states. It has the nation's largest underground natural gas storage capacity.

Those storage fields are nearly full with half of the gas Michigan customers will need this winter. The federal Energy Information Administration predicted last month that prices elsewhere in the Midwest could skyrocket 70 percent this winter. Its latest short-term energy outlook is set to be released today.

The cost of electricity, propane and heating oil also will rise.

Overall, Americans will spend \$1.08 trillion on energy this year, about 24 percent more than in 2004.

In particular, low-income residents likely will be hit the hardest by the expected energy price increases.

"If customers think they will have a problem paying their bill, call us," said Consumers Energy spokesman Terry DeDoes "Don't wait for a shutoff notice."

Utilities offer budget payment plans to all residential customers. Several grants also are available to help qualified low-income residents who are worried about paying bills. For more information, call the Michigan Public Service Commission at (800) 292-9555.

Winter heating predictions

Here's what the Michigan Public Service Commission predicted for these different forms of energy in its Michigan Energy Appraisal for winter 2005-06:

- Natural gas: Heating bills for average residential consumers will rise 46 percent this winter compared with year ago.
- Electricity: Sales will increase this year because the summer was so warm. No supply shortages are expected this winter.
- Petroleum: Oil supplies will remain tight while Gulf Coast production is down. Crude oil prices could spike again later this year.
- Motor gasoline: Gas prices will be in the \$2.50s and \$2.60s per gallon range nationwide in 2006. Michigan's gas use is forecast to dip 1.7 percent.
- Propane and heating oil: Significant increases are expected. So far, the average residential price for home heating oil has risen 37 percent, and propane is up 7.1 percent.

Source: Michigan Public Service Commission

Contact Stefanie Murray at 377-1016 or stamurray@lsj.com.

REPORT NO. --, VOLUME 35

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2005

P.S.C.: NATURAL GAS BILLS COULD BE 46% HIGHER THIS WINTER

Natural gas bills for home heating this winter could average 46 percent more than a year ago, the Public Service Commission warned in its annual winter energy appraisal statement issued Tuesday. Governor Jennifer Granholm used the statement to put utilities on notice that the state will watch closely to ensure no unnecessary rate hikes go into effect.

While individuals could see higher bills than the 46 percent increase, PSC Chair Peter Lark told reporters that the state may be in better position to handle high gas prices than in other states because the major utilities in Michigan stocked up on gas supplies well before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita did significant damage to the nation's natural gas supplies.

Prices in Michigan for a thousand cubic feet of gas are expected to average \$12.30 during the winter, the PSC said, compared to \$8.42 a year ago.

But in a number of states, especially in New England, costs could go as high as \$20 for every Mcf, the PSC said.

The average cost of heating a house with natural gas will likely rise from \$128 a month to \$187, the PSC said, and cost increases are also expected for individuals who heat with heating oil. Propane costs have also gone up, but not nearly as much, the PSC said.

In her statement, Ms. Granholm said that price increases will not be as high in Michigan as elsewhere will be of little comfort to state residents. She encouraged companies to enhance their efforts to reduce administrative costs to help keep overall costs to customers as low as possible.

Ms. Granholm also said she would continue in her efforts, along with the industry and other governors, to secure gas supplies and funding to pay for supplies to the state's poorest residents.

Looking at other energy supplies, the PSC said the increase in electric costs should be about 2.9 percent compared to a decline a year ago, caused mostly by the hot summer's demand on air conditioning. During the winter no shortages are expected for electricity, the PSC said.

Heat bill forecast is now at \$187

46% jump likely for winter months

October 12, 2005

BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Natural gas bills this winter are expected to rise at least \$59 a month to an average of nearly \$200 starting in November, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission's latest Winter Energy Appraisal report released in Lansing on Tuesday.

The cost of gas for the upcoming season is expected to average 46% more than it did last year, due largely to damage to the gulf coast region's energy facilities from hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Earlier this month, the agency had predicted prices would go up about 40%.

As a result, typical residential customers should expect their annual gas bills to go from an average of \$944 in the 2004-05 year to \$1,298 for 2005-06, according to the report.

"The MPSC estimates the average homeowner's winter bill increase will be about \$59 per month, bringing the average monthly winter natural gas bill to about \$187," said J. Peter Lark, chairman of the commission, in a statement. "With supplies down and demand up, prices have increased dramatically. So now is the best time to begin planning for higher natural gas bills."

You don't have to tell Debbie Myers that.

The Detroit resident paid as much as \$270 a month to heat her home last winter. This year she's almost certain to pay more than \$300.

"These prices are getting outrageous," said Myers, a 43-year-old financial services employee.

"But at least I work. My parents are on a fixed income and they just can't handle it."

In Michigan, 79% of homes are heated with natural gas, 10% with propane, 7% by electricity, and the rest by home heating oil, wood or solar power.

Consumers Energy, a Jackson-based unit of CMS Energy Corp., provides natural gas to about 1.7 million customers, mostly in the Detroit area. DTE Energy Corp.'s MichCon serves 1.2 million customers. SEMCO Energy Gas Co. of Port Huron serves 266,000 customers in the state.

"It is absolutely critical that customers take energy efficiency to a whole new level," said Laura Chappelle, one of the commissioners. "From dialing down the thermostat to weather-stripping around doors and windows."

In a news conference in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, the American Gas Association said there is no threat of a fuel shortage this winter, despite the fact that daily gulf coast gas production is about 60% below normal activity levels.

Wholesale natural gas prices have nearly tripled since 2001, as supplies have gotten tighter because of rising global demand. In addition, supply stoppages blamed on Katrina and Rita have strained the nation's energy infrastructure.

But as prices escalate, Gov. Jennifer Granholm is weighing in to make certain that no profiteering on natural gas takes place at the expense of residential consumers in Michigan.

"As the cost to provide natural gas to our citizens increases, I am reminding Michigan's utilities that the MPSC will be watching closely to ensure that charges passed on are reasonable and appropriate -- and no more," Granholm said in a statement. "The MPSC must be vigilant in protecting our citizens' pocketbooks, especially when costs of the things our citizens need most are on the rise."

Under Michigan law, utility companies may not earn profits on the supply of natural gas sold to their customers. They can only earn a regulated rate of return on delivery of service.

Natural gas cost-saving tips

The Michigan Public Service Commission recommends several ways consumers can save energy and money. Low-income residents can get financial assistance for high heating bills by contacting their local utilities about adopting energy budget plans. For more help, low-income residents and senior citizens can contact The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) at 800-866-8429.

Additional information can be found online at <http://michigan.gov/bewinterwise>, www.energy.savers.org or by calling the MPSC at 800-292-9555.

The MPSC will host a free forum at the Salvation Army headquarters, 16130 Northland Drive, Southfield, at 11 a.m. Thursday to highlight ways to lower winter heating bills and help with financial assistance

for low-income families.

Some suggestions:

- Clean or replace furnace filters regularly.
- Lower the thermostat on your water heater to 120 degrees.
- Add insulation to attics and walls if needed.
- Install a programmable thermostat that automatically dials down the temperature at night and when no one is home.
- Insulate your hot-water storage tank and pipes.
- Take a shower instead of a bath.
- Weather-strip around windows and doors.

Source: Michigan Public Service Commission.

Contact ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA at 313-222-5008 or bodipo@freepress.com.

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Cuddle up: Heat bills soar Residents in Michigan to pay 46% more this winter

By Nick Bunkley and Mark Hornbeck / The Detroit News

At the rate natural gas prices are rising this year, it may soon be cheaper to burn your money for warmth than to pay your utility bill.

Michigan residents can expect their winter heating bills to be an average of 46 percent higher this year and more than twice as much as they paid a few years ago.

But don't immediately start cursing Hurricanes Katrina and Rita when the snow starts flying and your MichCon bill dwarfs your car payment. Michigan residents have it better than most.

The state is expected to have the lowest heating bills in the Midwest this winter, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission's annual winter energy appraisal released Tuesday.

The spike in this winter's natural gas rates could have been higher, but Michigan was able to store more fuel than other states because it has the largest underground natural gas storage capacity in the nation. Texans and New Englanders could see increases of 90 percent.

Still, that's likely to be cold comfort for local residents this winter as they dig deep to pay heat bills.

The average bill between November and March is expected to jump \$59, from \$128 last year to \$187 this winter. That compares to \$88 in 2002 and \$114 in 2003.

"It's not the best news for customers," said Public Service Commission Chairman Peter Lark.

Michigan's two largest gas suppliers, Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. and Consumers Energy Co., increased their gas rate April 1, July 1 and Oct. 1, and they have filed requests for another increase Jan. 1.

MichCon plans to charge \$1.31 per hundred cubic feet, up from 66.2 cents in January. For a home that uses 16,000 cubic feet, which is typical during the five-month winter heating season, monthly bills would rise 77 percent, from \$138 last year to \$245 this year.

MichCon serves 1.2 million customers in Wayne and Washtenaw counties, the northern Lower Peninsula and parts of the Upper Peninsula.

Consumers Energy plans to charge 91.1 cents per hundred cubic feet, up from 62 cents in January. Monthly bills for a home that uses 16,000 cubic feet would rise 35 percent, from \$133 to \$179. Consumers Energy serves 1.7 million customers, mostly in Oakland and Macomb counties and the central Lower Peninsula. Lark said there is little chance that homeowners and renters will get relief this winter, but he predicted "slight moderation" in heating bills next winter, unless another disaster restricts supplies.

Natural gas is trading above \$14 per million Btu, partly because of supply problems caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

However, several other factors caused the price of gas to climb across the country from about \$5 per million Btu on the New York Mercantile Exchange last September 2004 to almost \$10 a few weeks before Katrina hit:

- Natural gas is used more frequently to power electric generation plants, which has caused an increase in demand.
- The cost of production is going up because many new wells are small and deep, with lower yields.
- Drilling moratoriums in some states have restricted supply.
- Natural gas prices generally follow oil prices, which have been near record levels for months.

Katrina and Rita only exacerbated those problems by cutting production in the Gulf of Mexico, where about 20 percent of the nation's gas supply originates. As of Tuesday, 60 percent of the region's gas production was down, resulting in a loss of 6 billion cubic feet a day, according to the U.S. Minerals Management Service.

"It was a real one-two punch for the industry," said John Felmy, chief economist for the American Petroleum Institute in Washington. "We don't have the flexibility to be able to import a lot more gas the way we do with oil."

Michigan utilities get about half of their natural gas from the Gulf Coast. Four out of five Michigan homes are heated with natural gas.

MichCon, Consumers Energy and other natural gas suppliers cannot profit from the price they charge for gas, and can only earn a regulated rate of return -- about 11 percent -- on the portions of bills that pay for delivery, according to state law. About 80 percent of a residential heating bill pays for gas and the rest goes to the utility.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm urged utilities to curb administrative costs so consumers are paying mainly for energy, not overhead.

"The PSC must be vigilant in protecting our citizens' pocketbooks," Granholm said, "especially when the costs of the things our citizens need most are on the rise."

Customers who need help with their heating bills are advised to call their utility as soon as possible.

"No one should go without heat in Michigan, because assistance is available," said Consumers Energy spokesman Jeff Holyfield. "People need to raise their hand and let us know they need help."

Any customer without a past-due balance can sign up for their utility's budget billing program, which spreads out payments.

Another option for customers 65 or older and low-income residents is their utility's winter protection plan, which prevents service shut-offs between Dec. 1 and March 31 as long as the customer pays a certain percentage of their annual bill. Low-income customers and senior citizens also might qualify for a special rate or discount offered by some utilities.

Starting in January, utilities will help their low-income customers file for the Michigan Home Heating Credit, which reimburses qualified families \$200 or more. Only about one-third of those eligible file for the credit.

Both MichCon and Consumers Energy have a wealth of information on their Web sites, ConsumersEnergy.com and My.DTEEnergy.com, to help customers understand and analyze their bills.

You can reach Nick Bunkley at (313) 222-2293 or nbunkley@detnews.com.

ASSOCIATED PRESS WIRE

Natural Gas Users to Take Hit This Winter

By H. JOSEF HEBERT

Wednesday, October 12, 2005 9:51 AM EDT

WASHINGTON - Winter heating bills will be a third to a half higher for most families across the country, with the sharpest increases expected for those who heat with natural gas, the Energy Department forecast Wednesday.

The department said natural gas users can expect to pay an average of \$350 more during the upcoming winter compared to last year, an increase of 48 percent. Those who heat their homes with fuel oil will pay \$378 more, or 32 percent higher than last winter.

Propane users can expect a percentage jump in their bills similar to those of fuel oil users.

In its winter fuels outlooks report, DOE's Energy Information Administration assumed a normal winter and steady progress in restoring oil and natural gas production and refinery output from the damage inflicted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"Should colder weather prevail, expenditures will be significantly higher," the EIA said.

The agency as well as the natural gas industry said that heating costs could vary widely among regions.

A month ago, the EIA said natural gas prices could jump as much as 71 percent in the Midwest, where four of every five homes are heated by gas. It made no such specific assessment this time, but acknowledged that a colder-than-normal winter in the Midwest would produce significantly higher costs.

The cost of fuel accounts for about 70 percent of the price utilities charge retail residential customers, according to the American Gas Association.

EIA said it expects continued recovery of the energy system in the Gulf region in the coming months. But it said it expects a third of the Gulf's crude oil and a fifth of its natural gas to remain shut-in into December.

It also projected wholesale natural gas prices staying at about \$12 per thousand cubic feet through the winter heavy demand period, twice what it cost last winter.

For some low-income families the sharp jumps could mean choosing whether to eat or keep warm, energy experts and advocacy groups fear.

The natural gas utilities warned Tuesday that despite their attempts to contain retail fuel costs, heating bills for gas users this winter will jump 50 percent over last season nationwide. In parts

of the Midwest bills could be much higher.

More than half of all U.S. households heat with natural gas. But many of those who rely on electric heat, nearly a third of the country, may also see bills go up because many power plants run on natural gas. And users of fuel oil, more than half the households in New England, are expected to see their costs jump by a third or more over last winter, according to industry and government estimates.

"We have never had prices so high and increase so quickly," said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, which represents the state agencies that distribute money to help low-income families pay their fuel bills.

This winter, Wolfe expects more than a million additional applicants for the government program, a 20 percent increase over last year, with not enough money to go around. Congress provided \$2.2 billion for the program, known as LIHEAP, last year. Wolfe said \$5.1 billion is needed to keep pace this coming winter with the soaring energy costs and expanded demand.

With federal funding levels uncertain, many states are scrambling to fill in the gap as best they can, Wolfe said. He and other advocates are urging Congress to approve the additional money as part of the recovery efforts from hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The double punch of the two hurricanes knocked out 20 percent of the nation's natural gas production, severely damaged gas processing facilities along the Gulf Coast and shut down more than a dozen refineries. As a result, natural gas supplies and heating oil are tight as functioning refineries focused on getting enough gasoline onto the market _ and not building up stocks of heating oil.

Demand for heating oil increased after a report Tuesday from Accuweather.com projecting a "colder-than-normal" winter over the Northeast where most heating oil is used. Fuel oil and natural gas prices increased sharply on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

"We are confident that natural gas supplies will be adequate this winter," Paul Wilkinson, vice president for policy analysis at the American Gas Association, said at a news conference previewing the upcoming winter heating situation.

The AGA represents the country's natural gas utilities.

Wilkinson said the amount of gas in storage by the end of this month, the beginning of the winter heating season, will be above the five-year average, and while the pace of recovery from the hurricanes remains uncertain, more production from the stricken region is expected into the winter.

But the gas utilities put in storage is expensive, much of it bought last summer at prices at or near \$9 a thousand cubic feet, compared with \$6 last winter. Prices have spiked to as much as \$14 a thousand cubic feet since the hurricanes and are expected to be in the \$11 range in the months ahead.

Utilities try to cushion consumers from the volatile price spikes by buying much of their gas in summer and putting it in storage, using hedging mechanisms in the commodity markets and providing consumers with balanced billing plans over a 12-month period, says Roger Cooper, AGA vice president.

But this year "we've plucked the low level fruit" in using such tactics and more of the wholesale fuel costs will have to be passed on, he said.

Heating costs for the average family using fuel oil in the Northeast is projected by the group to be as much as \$1,867 for the winter heating season, an increase of \$605 over last winter, and \$915 more than two years ago.

About half of all households in New England use fuel oil.

In the Midwest, where natural gas heats 79 percent of all homes, according to AGA, the winter heating costs are projected to soar to \$1,568 for the season, an increase of \$611 over last winter, according to Wolfe.

On the Net:

American Gas Association: <http://www.aga.org>

Energy Information Administration: <http://www.eia.doe.gov>

National Energy Assistance' Directors Association: <http://www.neada.org>

A service of the Associated Press(AP)

Heat bills will give you chills

Conserving energy becomes paramount with price hikes of 46 percent this winter

PUBLISHED: October 12, 2005

By Dan Heaton
Macomb Daily Business Editor

With heating bills in Michigan expected to soar 46 percent this winter, Jim Dulley suggests you light some incense.

"If you light some incense and hold it around the doors, around the windows and elsewhere in your home, you can tell exactly where the draft is," he said. "That way you'll know what areas you need to better insulate."

"The MPSC estimates the average homeowner's winter bill increase will be about \$59 per month, bringing the average monthly winter natural gas bill to about \$187," said J. Peter Lark, chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission. "With supplies down and demand up, prices have increased dramatically."

That's why Dulley is suggesting his incense trick, and other measures, to better winterize your home.

Dulley, a home improvement expert who writes a syndicated column that appears in The Macomb Daily and 400 other newspapers, said there are several tricks that homeowners can employ to save on heating bills.

One idea, he said, is when you take a shower, to close the drain in the tub to let the shower water stand in the tub.

"You have a lot of heat energy in that water. If you let it stand in the tub for an hour, that will allow that heat to transfer to the air, plus you'll be adding some humidity to the house, which is an issue in Michigan during the winter," he said. "The same principle applies if you wash dishes by hand."

Other ideas are just as simple, he said.

"Dialing back the thermostat makes a big difference. I know people who still keep the thermostat at 72. You have to dial it back and put on a sweater," he said. "Then at night, dial it back even further when you are under the covers."

The price of natural gas has been rising because of production facilities located in the Gulf Coast region being offline following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. With the winter months approaching, demand is

growing at the exact moment that supply for natural gas has been cut, causing prices to rise, much the same as liquid gasoline has spiked in price.

"Even before the hurricanes, there was pressure on natural gas prices," said Tim Lubbers, a spokesman for SEMCO Energy, a utility that serves northern Macomb County. "The demand for natural gas has been increasing for several years. All the new power plants are fueled by natural gas. Supply has simply not kept up."

"Now, the hurricanes have caused the price to spike," he said. Lubbers said last winter SEMCO was charging customers approximately 84 cents per 100 cubic feet (CCF) of natural gas. Now, on the open market, natural gas is ranging anywhere from \$1.10 to \$1.40 when priced per CCF. SEMCO actually purchases the gas in larger units, known as MCF.

"We don't make a dime on the high price," Lubbers said. "We just pass on the cost of the gas we pay. That's the same way with all the utilities." Now, Lubbers and others are urging consumers to do their best to conserve energy this winter.

"With the dramatic increase in natural gas prices, it is absolutely critical that customers take energy efficiency to a whole new level -- from dialing down the thermostat to weather-stripping around doors and windows," said MPSC Commissioner Laura Chappelle.

In a statement issued Tuesday, the MPSC said several programs are in place to aid those who need help in paying their winter heating bills.

"In September, the MPSC announced that it would make \$41 million in grants to organizations that help low-income people with their bills, and (Monday) the MPSC announced \$10 million in grants for low-income energy efficiency," MPSC Commissioner Monica Martinez said. "We expect that money to be available early next year -- just when the large bills arrive."

Other financial assistance programs are:

Utility budget payment plans, available to any residential customer
The Winter Protection Plan, created by the MPSC and administered by the utilities, is available to senior citizens age 65 and older, people receiving assistance from the Michigan Department of Human Services, or people with incomes at or below 150 percent of the poverty level.
The Michigan Home Heating Credit from the Michigan Department of Treasury. Forms will be available by the end of January anywhere tax forms are located. After Feb. 1, 2006, forms will be available by calling (800) 367-6263. Forms must be filed by Sept. 30, 2006.

Home heating savings tips

Clean or replace furnace filters regularly, according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Lower the thermostat on your water heater. A setting of 120 degrees is comfortable for most uses.

Add insulation to attics and walls, if needed.

Install a programmable thermostat that automatically dials down the temperature at night and when no one is home.

Insulate your gas or oil hot-water storage tank and pipes, being careful not to cover the thermostat.

Source: Michigan Public Service Commission.

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Agencies await funds to help pay heating bills

By Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Social services agencies are anticipating a disaster in helping low-income residents this winter on their heating bills, as energy costs are expected to increase 46 percent over last year.

"This is our Katrina," said The Heat and Warmth Fund Executive Director Kathleen Walgren. "We know it's coming. We don't know what to do. People are going to get shut-off notices, and if there isn't significant money, we are not going to be able to help them. "

Exactly how much funding will be available in Michigan this year to help low-income residents with their heat bills is unclear. The Michigan Department of Human Services is still waiting for the federal government to pass its budget so it can determine how much it will get for its state emergency fund that aids people with shut-off notices, spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said. Last year, the state received \$62.9 million and aided 350,000 people.

The Heat and Warmth Fund, or THAW, assists residents in danger of losing their heat or electricity, won't know until January how much funding it will receive.

Consumers Energy has given \$1.5 million in energy credits to the Salvation Army to assist low-income people having trouble with their heat bills. It is also working with customers who need help deferring payment on bills through its Winter Protection Plan.

Luther Perry, 54, has approached THAW to help with his overdue \$548 heat and light bill, but wasn't able to get help because money isn't available yet. He has already gotten a couple of shut-off notices.

"I am worried about freezing," said Perry, who is disabled.

To raise money this year, THAW is targeting potential donors. DTE Energy, SEMCO Energy and Auqila Inc. are enclosing the appeal in bills this month and next.

How to get help

Need help on heating bills? Here are some places to try:

- Contact The Heat and Warmth Fund, (800) 866-THAW.
- Apply for assistance at one of Michigan Department of Human Services Office, www.michigan.gov/dhs.

- Contact Consumers Energy/DTE (800) 477-5050

How to help others

- Call the donation line, (313) 226-9392.

- Mail a check payable to: The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), 1212 Griswold, Detroit, MI 48226.

- Make a donation online at

www.thawfund.org.
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Wednesday, October 12, 2005

10 ways to cut your heating costs

Spending a little now can save you lots of cash later

By Michael H. Hodges / The Detroit News

This isn't just economics. This is war.

And like any campaign, you need a battle strategy to figure out how to cut and slash those skyrocketing home heating bills down to levels your budget can survive.

In Oakland Township, Claire Rewold has caulked the windows on her 100-year-old farmhouse, put up storm windows, and replaced an exterior door so she no longer has to hang a blanket over it to keep out winter drafts.

"It's horrible," said the early-education specialist of the rapidly soaring prices. "A lot of people are going to be really strapped this year just trying to stay warm."

Happily, you are not helpless. Heat-saving steps you can take to head the enemy off at the pass range from the easy to the expensive, said Dave Moran of Home Energy Analysis Team in St. Clair County.

"Air-sealing is one of the quickest and cheapest paybacks," said Moran, by which he means plugging small holes and leaks to reduce heat loss.

In Northville, retirees John and Linda Osborne have hired HandyPro Handyman Service to caulk around the outside of their 15 windows.

"I'd been putting it off," said Linda Osborne, "but the rising prices gave me the impetus to think I better do something quick." She and her husband have already installed a high-efficiency gas furnace and put down more insulation.

Gas powers nearly everything in their house -- furnace, hot-water heater and drier. Last year, their highest monthly bills from Consumers Energy averaged \$200 a month. This year, the former schoolteachers could easily be looking at an extra \$70 a month, which is bound to take an ugly bite out of their budget. They're lucky -- customers who get their gas from DTE Energy will see a 77 percent hike.

Asked how they'll cope, Linda Osborne laughed a little.

"Denial works for me," she said, but added that she and her husband will likely eat out less "or cut down on the sprinkling in the summer, because that cost is very high."

Still, look on the bright side. Even at the new, punishing rates, both heating oil -- seldom used these days in Michigan -- and natural gas are still cheaper than electrical heat, according to DTE Energy officials.

Even so, with winter barreling down upon us, now's the time to launch a counterstrike. Here follow 10 ways you can dial down your energy pain:

How to get help
Need help on heating bills? Here are some places to try:
Contact The Heat and Warmth Fund, (800) 866-THAW.

Apply for assistance at one of Michigan Department of Human Services Office,
www.michigan.gov/dhs .

Contact Consumers Energy/DTE (800) 477-5050

How to help others
Call the donation line, (313) 226-9392.

Mail a check payable to: The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), 1212 Griswold, Detroit, MI 48226.

Make a donation online at www.thawfund.org .

1.It's not the heat. It's the humidity: According to the U.S. Department of Energy, a humidifier boosts the "heat index" and makes 68 degrees feel like 76. Plus, it'll keep your skin from drying out.

2.Get high-tech: A computerized thermostat, which ranges from \$70 to \$200, will guarantee your heat gets reduced overnight and during the work day when no one's around -- a great hedge against forgetfulness.

3.Turn it down: Dollar-smart consumers will pile on the blankets, put on long underwear, and turn down the thermostat, said Stephen Ewing, president of DTE Energy Gas. "For every degree you dial down," he added, "you save 3 percent on your bill."

4. Go solar: The Ontario Ministry of Energy recommends opening south-facing curtains and blinds to take advantage of the sun's heat, then shutting them at night. Clean glass helps, too. (You can go completely 21st century with photo-voltaic cells on your roof, but those, alas, work better out West than with Michigan's cloudy winters.)

5.Don't heat the great outdoors: Fireplaces can vent as much as 24,000 cubic feet of furnace-heated air to the outside -- particularly once the fire has died down and is just smoldering. And by all means, close the damper when not in use.

A modern, airtight wood stove, however, might be a way to supplement your heating needs at considerable savings.

An average household that uses 700 gallons of heating oil a winter will shell out roughly \$1,900 this year.

But according to the federal government's National Agricultural Safety Database, you can get the same heat output with 6.5 cords of hardwood.

Cords in Metro Detroit are running around \$80, which means an annual heating total of \$520 -- about \$1,380 in savings.

6.Spread a blanket: Putting down 12 inches of insulation in your attic is the easiest and most cost-effective way to warm up your house. In addition, walls, floors and basement foundation can all profit from the same treatment.

Common types of insulation include fiberglass rolls or batts, cut to ordinary joist widths, or loose-fill insulation like cellulose that can be blown into walls or attic.

An attic batt or blanket from Home Depot that covers 77 1/2 square feet with 6 1/4 inches of insulation will run you about \$30.

7. Keep your furnace happy: Change filters in forced-air systems once a month. Hot-water radiators need to be bled once or twice a season, while steam radiators have to have sediments removed a couple times a year. Consult your owner's manual for required maintenance.

Also, clean registers as needed, and make sure furniture or drapes aren't blocking them.

If your furnace is more than 25 years old, it might be time to replace it. A modern furnace with combustion efficiency greater than 90 percent is likely to run you around \$3,000.

But if you're staying in your house for five years, said Dave Moran of Home Energy Analysis Team, the cost "is worth it in the long run."

Still, while replacing your old clunker with a high-efficiency furnace can trim costs by 10 percent to 25 percent, don't jump too fast.

"Realistically," said Bill Moosbrugger at Ann Arbor's Koch & White Heating & Cooling, "if you've got a good furnace in the 80 percent efficiency range, and it's been maintained, take a look at all the other stuff" you can do to save on heat before shelling out for a new model.

8. Seek counseling: Confused about where to start? You might want to get an energy audit from a qualified specialist, who can pinpoint exactly where the heat -- and dollars -- are billowing out of your house.

A comprehensive audit for a 2,000-square-foot home will run somewhere in the neighborhood of \$400.

9. Windows matter: If you've got them, get those storm windows up and out of the basement. If not, a sheet of plastic stretched and taped across the inside of a window can also reduce heat leakage by 25 percent to 50 percent.

New windows, of course, do even more, and today come in energy-efficient, gas-filled double-paned varieties that require no storms whatsoever.

And they might not be as costly as you think. Stanford Blanck, vice president of Wallside Windows in Taylor, said the total cost for replacing a typical 28-inch by 45-inch window "would be under \$300."

10. Houses shouldn't leak: Doors and windows are responsible for about a third of a house's energy drain. Install weather-stripping all around doors, and caulk leaky windows as well as any cracks or other holes where air can get through. Rope caulk is available from hardware stores, and can be reused next year.

You can reach Michael H. Hodges at (313) 222-6021 or mhodges@detnews.com.

Lansing State Journal

October 12, 2005

Get efficient

Bravo to the LSJ for the Sept. 21 front-page story headlined "Lawmakers push for heating aid increase." Investing in weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades makes a whole lot of sense.

For example, switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs will generally pay for itself in a year and keep saving the homeowner for years to come, whereas simply paying a fuel bill is only good for one year. Our representatives would do our community/state a great service by supporting investments in upgrades that will make our homes more energy efficient year after year.

I was disappointed to see that our own Congressman Mike Rogers was not listed as a supporter of more funding that could reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

Urban Options has been assisting residents for years in lowering their energy bills while reducing the environmental impacts. Visit www.urbanoptions.org to learn more.

Terry Link
president
Urban Options
Laingsburg

Lansing State Journal

October 12, 2005

Survival mechanism

In Monday's column, I quoted a Department of Human Service employee lamenting the dishonesty of some clients. People denied utility services for nonpayment, she said, often reinstate those services in the names of their children.

In response, Erica Schmittiel of East Lansing, in an e-mail to me, offered a different perspective on deceiving utility companies:

"I have seen this a lot in my experience as a social worker. While I do not condone this practice, it is a survival tactic for many. People need gas, water and electric to live. Landlords often do not want to rent to people if they are unable to take responsibility for the utilities."

Schmittiel recommended that those who don't have to worry about keeping their furnaces running contribute to funds set up to help the poor pay their utility bills - through the utility companies or through charities.

Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Changing tune on energy

All right: What have they done with George Bush? For five years the president and his vice president have pretty much ignored incorporating energy conservation into the administration's energy policy. The emphasis has been on finding new oil and gas sources so the drive-happy public can keep on consuming at 70 mph.

Now that hurricanes Katrina and Rita have added emphasis to warnings about adequate fuel supplies, the president and his administration have begun advising motorists to avoid driving where they can, install insulation and be prepared to turn the thermostat down this winter.

That's good advice, but here's a question: Does anyone in the White House think Americans haven't already figured that out?

— Charlotte, N.C., Observer (Oct. 5)

LSJ

10/12

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Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Son's arrests rock Hendrix U-M student's problems grab attention in a mayoral race that has been dominated by personal attacks.

By David Josar and Ronald J. Hansen / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Freman Hendrix's once-confident campaign for Detroit mayor suffered a potential setback Tuesday as his son faced charges of domestic assault and drunken driving.

It was disclosed that Stephen Hendrix, 21, had been charged Sept. 14 with driving under the influence -- one day before Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick raised questions during a debate about whether any members of the Hendrix family had been in trouble with the law.

Hendrix appeared stunned by the implication at the time, and later denied that anyone in his family had ever been arrested. The drunken driving charge stems from an April traffic stop, but Hendrix said he didn't learn about it until Tuesday.

Kilpatrick spokeswoman Ceeon Quiett on Tuesday said the mayor knew nothing during that debate about the drunken driving arrest. But the incidents brought a swift and unexpected turn in a hotly contested mayoral campaign in which virtually everything had been going in Hendrix's favor.

"I am the same guy I was 24 hours ago," a teary-eyed Hendrix said after posting bond for his son in an Ann Arbor court.

"I'm the one running for mayor and not Stephen," said Hendrix, who was surrounded by about 100 supporters at a news conference in his campaign headquarters. "I'm not campaigning to be the parent of the year or debate champion of the city of Detroit. My campaign is to be mayor of this city, and we have major challenges."

The events of the prior 36 hours had taken a visible toll on Hendrix, who resumed campaigning Tuesday night at a community forum on the east side.

His son was released on a \$5,000, 10 percent bond Tuesday morning after having been arrested and jailed by police early Monday for an incident involving Monique Eubanks, an 18-year-old Eastern Michigan University student from Ypsilanti. Stephen Hendrix pleaded not guilty to a single count of domestic violence, a misdemeanor.

Stephen Hendrix's attorney, John Shea, said his client denies the charge.

"He absolutely, categorically denies assaulting anyone," said Shea. "My client pled not guilty because he is not guilty."

Then he was arraigned in Ypsilanti on charges filed after he was pulled over April 2, less than three weeks after he turned 21, on suspicion of drunken driving, according to court records. Two misdemeanor charges -- operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol and possessing an open container of alcohol in his vehicle -- were filed Sept. 14 in Ypsilanti Township.

Hendrix was ordered to appear in court on the drunken driving charge on Oct. 6 but failed to appear, records show.

Shea, who was hired by the Hendrix family on Monday to represent Stephen Hendrix on the assault charge, said his client did not know about the drunken driving charges. He was not

notified about them or last week's hearing in the case because the court had mistakenly sent the summons to the wrong address.

"He repeatedly called the court in April and May in an effort to find out when or if he was going to be charged with drunken driving," Shea said. "He was repeatedly told he had not been charged."

Shea said Stephen Hendrix had submitted to a Breathalyzer test on April 2 that registered .09098. A .08 reading is considered legally drunk in Michigan.

The drunken driving charge was discovered Tuesday when a reporter checked court records and asked Shea about it. He immediately told the Hendrix family and arranged for the arraignment in that case as well.

To date, most of the public controversy in the mayoral campaign had focused on the incumbent Kilpatrick's use of a city credit card and an expensive city-purchased SUV. Freeman Hendrix has led decisively in polls and fund-raising.

But experts said the abrupt turn isn't necessarily a fatal blow to the Hendrix campaign. If Detroiters believe that he responded well to a family crisis, that may even reinforce his positive image, said political consultant Sam Riddle.

"People are seeing the hard decisions he is making as a parent and that shows the compassion people look for in their leaders," Riddle said.

After court on Tuesday, Hendrix said he picked up his son, took him to lunch and let him take a hot shower in the family home in Detroit. Stephen Hendrix will return to classes at the University of Michigan Business School on Wednesday.

"Every dad in this city can appreciate what I'm going through," Hendrix said. "I just wish my kids didn't have to go through this."

Hendrix also made a not-so-subtle allusion Tuesday to Kilpatrick's evasive answers to questions after the Detroit Police Department leased a Lincoln Navigator for his wife. "I am not going to deny, deny and deny," he said.

City Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel, a friend of Hendrix who is backing him for mayor, said she doesn't think the incident will have a negative impact on his campaign.

The Hendrix family has put forth a "candid" and "class act" in handling the situation, Cockrel said.

"I salute the approach that the Hendrix family has taken in dealing with this most difficult of circumstances," Cockrel said. "It's a role model for any one of us who might have to deal with a similar situation."

Washtenaw County Prosecutor Brian Mackie declined to discuss specifics about the drunken driving case.

As part of the condition of his bond, Stephen Hendrix is not to have contact with the woman involved in the domestic assault case. He also must undergo drug and alcohol testing.

Friends and acquaintances of Eubanks described her as smart and outgoing.

Marcus Mack, 18, who lived across the street and attended school with Eubanks while she lived in Detroit, said Eubanks is "a cool, sweet person. She was an all-around nice person."

While Freeman Hendrix campaigned in the primary, his son returned to Detroit often from a summer job in Chicago to help his father.

When voters were casting their ballots in the August primary, they spent most of the day together.

Kilpatrick, when asked to comment on the charge against Stephen Hendrix, said there wasn't much to say about the report.

"We do what he asked, and pray for Mr. Hendrix and his family, pray for the injured young lady and her family, and that's about it," Kilpatrick said.

There was no allegation in the court records or during the arraignment the woman was injured.

Detroit News Staff Writers Francis X. Donnelly, Lisa M. Collins and David Shepardson contributed to this report. You can reach David Josar at (313) 222-2073 or [djoser@detnews.com](mailto:djosar@detnews.com).

Hendrix's Son Back In Court For Another Charge

Mayoral Candidate Says He Was Unaware Of Son's Traffic Stop

POSTED: 6:24 pm EDT October 11, 2005

The 21-year-old son of Freman Hendrix made two separate appearances in court on Tuesday, one for an incident the Detroit mayoral candidate said he had no knowledge of, Local 4 reported. Stephen Hendrix was arraigned Tuesday morning in an Ann Arbor court on a domestic violence charge. Just hours after his father posted bond for his release, Hendrix went to an Ypsilanti Township court to face charges in connection with an April 2 traffic stop.

Local 4 confirmed with police that Stephen Hendrix was pulled over after officers suspected he may have been drinking and driving. He was arrested on charges of operating under the influence of liquor and having an open alcohol container in his vehicle, the station reported.

Freman Hendrix said that his son apparently kept the OUIL arrest from him.

"I found out today, just as you guys did," he told Local 4 reporters during a Tuesday afternoon news conference. "My children are very independent and they try to manage their affairs in a way that they don't bring a burden back to their parents. And, as for my son is concerned, he is not interested in my wrath, either."

Hendrix added that he was heartbroken to hear of the traffic arrest, but "like 21-year-olds, he'll make his mistakes."

Stephen Hendrix entered a not guilty plea in the domestic violence case Tuesday morning, Local 4 reported. Hendrix, who is a student at the University of Michigan School of Business, was arrested at about 1:30 a.m. at his off-campus apartment in Ann Arbor for an alleged assault involving an 18-year-old woman, who is a sophomore at Eastern Michigan University, the station reported.

Hendrix was released from the Washtenaw County Jail after his father posted 10 percent of the \$5,000 bond. As part of the condition of his bond, Stephen Hendrix is not to have contact with the 18-year-old woman involved in the case. He also has to maintain regular contact with a community corrections officer and will have to undergo drug and alcohol testing, the station reported.

Stephen Hendrix is expected to return to court for a pretrial hearing on Nov. 2. He also faces a Nov. 17 court date on the OUIL charge, the station reported.

Incumbent Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, when asked to respond to the charges against his opponent's son, said, "I would simply say that we would do what Mr. Hendrix has asked us to do, pray for him and his family and pray for the young lady who was injured and her family, and hope for the best in the outcome."

Robert Sanders, a spokesperson for the family of the 18-year-old woman involved in the case, said the domestic incident appears to be a misunderstanding blown out of proportion.

"She's back in school focusing on school," Sanders said. "The guy made poor judgment on his actions, so therefore everything is going to be ... followed up with the law."

Sanders added that the woman's family is not angry with the Hendrix family.

"They're young kids," Sanders said. "They got their whole life ahead of them, and nobody wants any bad blood."

It is Clickondetroit.com's policy to not identify victims in domestic cases.

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Girlfriend charged in stabbing death

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A woman who confessed to stabbing her live-in boyfriend to death told police she was enraged when he came home with another woman.

Cynthia Mills, 47, was arraigned Tuesday in Grand Rapids District Court on a charge of open murder in the slaying of Donald Ace Thompson.

Police arrested her late Sunday at Metropolitan Hospital, where she was being treated for what police called a severe, stress-induced headache. Detectives said she appeared remorseful.

Mills told police she was at their home, 846 Logan St. SE, early Sunday when Thompson, 40, pulled up in a van with another woman. She attacked him when he was inside the home, police said. Thompson was stabbed more than once, and his throat was cut, Capt. Jeffrey Hertel said.

"It wasn't like cases we've had in the past, where it's overkill," Hertel said.

Thompson stumbled outside and died on the sidewalk several doors down, where a newspaper carrier found him. A witness reported seeing a woman remove something from the victim's pockets while he lay injured on the sidewalk.

Detectives recovered the knife and later found the victim's van.

Police haven't confirmed whether the slaying was induced by rage, Hertel said. Such a case could lead to lesser charges, perhaps second-degree murder or manslaughter, police said.

Nobody witnessed the stabbing. Police were looking for the other woman, who had not been identified. Detectives also were trying to find neighbors who may have seen or heard the events that led to the death, Hertel said.

Thompson, whose family is from Bay City, recently worked at Louis Padnos Iron & Metal in Grand Rapids, police said.

Police said there was no history of domestic problems at the home. Mills' only convictions are traffic-related and for creating a disturbance, records show.

Mills was held in the Kent County Jail without bond. A probable cause hearing is set for Oct. 25.

Charges dropped in Holt sex abuse case

Prosecutor: Girl unable to testify against suspect

By Kelly Hassett
Lansing State Journal

A possible life term in prison hung over Jose Hernandez as he sat in an Ingham County courtroom at 9 a.m. Tuesday.

Fifteen minutes later, the Holt man was making plans for a quiet evening at home with his wife. Hernandez, 48, was scheduled to start trial Tuesday in front of Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield on charges he sexually assaulted a child in his wife's in-home day care earlier this year.

But at the last minute, Ingham County prosecutors moved to drop the charges, which were punishable by up to life in prison, because the 6-year-old girl was unable to give her testimony, Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said.

The girl stopped talking about the case after she accidentally came into contact with Hernandez in a courthouse elevator during a hearing several weeks ago, Dunnings said.

"The girl has completely repressed everything related to this," he said. "That's a common problem that we have with little kids' cases."

Hernandez's attorney, Andrew Wilkins, said Tuesday afternoon he was not aware of the interaction to which Dunnings referred but does not know how that would affect the girl's memory.

"My interpretation is that the victim didn't want to go forward," he said, indicating the charges had no merit.

A quiet Hernandez, who relaxed Tuesday afternoon in his leaf-covered Holt home with his wife Claudia, 38, said he was happy and relieved when the charges were dropped.

"(Now we can) just keep going on with our life," he said.

Jurors were not yet seated, Wilkins said, which would rule out the danger of double jeopardy if Hernandez was re-charged. But it's unclear what prosecutors plan to do next.

Hernandez had maintained his innocence since he was charged in February. His wife's license for her home day care - which about eight children attended - was suspended at that time, said Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet.

Now that the criminal case was over, Wilkins said he will talk to the state about reinstating Claudia Hernandez's day-care license, which she'd had for her Fontaine Trail home since August 2003.

Not seeing the children in her day care - many of whom she'd cared for since they were 3 months old - was one of the most painful parts of the eight-month ordeal, Claudia Hernandez said with tears in her eyes.

In order to make ends meet, she and her husband, who was free on bond, had to rely on neighbors to give them odd jobs.

The stress was so much for her husband that he was hospitalized the week after he was charged for a mild heart attack, Claudia Hernandez said.

They're looking forward to spending time with their two sons and each other, Claudia Hernandez said, adding that they're celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary Nov. 8.

"I think we're going to go to a good restaurant ... just the two of us ... and talk about our plans for the future," she said. "Now we can do that."

Contact Kelly Hassett at 267-1301 or khassett@lsj.com.

October 12, 2005

Boy, 14, allegedly assaulted in jail

Three inmates may face charges

By SHERI MCWHIRTER
Record-Eagle staff writer

GAYLORD - Three adult inmates allegedly sexually assaulted a 14-year-old Gaylord boy at the Otsego County Jail where the teen was being held on burglary and home invasion charges.

The incident allegedly occurred Sept. 22, after the boy was charged as an adult for breaking and entering Al's Market, a shop on the east side of Otsego Lake near Old U.S. Highway 27. He was lodged among the general population but is now isolated from adult prisoners, jail officials said.

Otsego County Prosecutor Kyle Legel said the boy told his mother of the alleged assaults during a jail visit last week and authorities launched an investigation. Legel is considering sexual assault charges against the three accused inmates, whose names authorities withheld.

Lt. Brian Webber, jail administrator for the Otsego County Sheriff's Department, said the three suspects allegedly rubbed their exposed genitalia on the juvenile in the cell they shared, a space not viewed by security cameras.

"We wouldn't knowingly endanger anyone," Webber said. "He was put in a cell with inmates closer to his age. They chose to pick on the kid."

Security cameras are not trained on areas inside jail cells and provide images only along hallways and catwalks. Corrections officers check the cells every 30 minutes.

Sheriff Jim McBride said there is no internal investigation of the jail system or personnel.

"My staff followed policy. As soon as we learned of the alleged incident, we began investigating the three suspects, not any jail personnel," McBride said.

Chuck Moses of Houghton Lake is the boy's attorney. He said his client is doing well in isolation.

"His mother is very upset, as you can imagine," Moses said, adding the family is considering a lawsuit against the county for allegedly failing to protect the boy.

The three accused inmates are all young adults, he said.

The teen was ordered into adult court by 46th Circuit Judge Michael Cooper. The

boy has a lengthy criminal history, including multiple breaking and entering charges. He had seven cases in juvenile court before Cooper's ruling.

This is the third reported sexual assault at the jail in the last 13 months, Legel said, a problem he said is partly due to overcrowded conditions.

"You have to put too many people in a cell together and these things can happen, unfortunately," Legel said.

Three inmates attacked and raped another inmate on Sept. 25, 2004. The Gaylord men, Nicoma Creager, 21, Matthew Richards, 22, and Kody Padgett, 18, all pleaded guilty to the sexual assault. Creager and Richards are in state prisons, while Padgett remains at the jail in Gaylord.

Dr. Sharon Stewart, 45, also was charged with sexual assault while held at the jail, after two alleged incidents with another female inmate on Dec. 19. The sexual assault charge was dropped in a plea agreement on a previous arson charge. She will be sentenced on Oct. 20.

Webber said the assaults are disturbing, but he wouldn't entirely blame overcrowding.

"It could happen if you had just two guys in a cell," Webber said.

The 34-bed facility averages between 40 and 50 inmates each day.

Dad pleads guilty to sex crime

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

A Chicago Heights, Ill., man who police said had two children by his teenage daughter has pleaded guilty in Battle Creek to criminal sexual conduct.

Michael A. Amos, 36, entered his plea Monday in Calhoun County Circuit Court just before he was scheduled to stand trial on six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct involving his daughter, 15.

Calhoun County prosecutors and Battle Creek police alleged that Amos had sex with the girl between Oct. 16, 2004, and March 27.

"Incest is more common than people believe," Prosecutor John Hallacy said. "It is routine for us."

Hallacy said Tuesday he did not have the number of incest cases prosecuted in the county because defendants can be charged under statutes specifying age instead of family relationship. "But I tried one last year, and afterwards the question from jurors was, 'Wow, I didn't think this happened.'"

"They are stunned," Hallacy said. "It really is a crime that is behind closed doors and within the family, and that makes it more secretive and embarrassing and the victims don't know there is anything wrong because that is how they are being raised."

Hallacy said fathers impregnating their daughters is not as common but "we do see it."

The Michigan Department of Human Services reported 349 cases of child abuse and neglect in Calhoun County in 2004, including 17 cases of sexual abuse of a child by a parent.

During his plea, Amos told Circuit Judge Conrad Sindt that he had sex with the girl at a Battle Creek motel during visits with her while she was living in a foster care home in the area.

The girl's mother lost custody in 2000, officials said, and the girl had lived with other family members in the Chicago area and in west Michigan, including Battle Creek.

Amos had retained visitation rights.

The girl gave birth to a child in May 2004 and a second one in May 2005. She had refused to tell investigators who was the father after the birth of her first child.

However, investigators from Michigan's Child Protective Services ordered tests of Amos after an anonymous source reported he might be the father.

Assistant Prosecutor Michelle Richardson said none of the six sexual assaults Amos was charged with in Calhoun County resulted in her pregnancies.

The two infants remain with their mother, who now is living in another Michigan county.

Amos is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 14. Richardson and defense attorney Gary Gabry agreed that preliminary sentence guidelines call for a minimum of between 14 and 23 years in prison.

The maximum possible sentence is life.

If Sindt decides to sentence above the guidelines, Amos may withdraw his plea and face trial.

Hallacy said public education and awareness is one way to attack the problem.

"People need to be aware and look for certain signs in children."

Signs of sexual abuse in children
Unexplained bruises, redness, or
bleeding of the child's genitals,
anus or mouth.

Pain at the genitals, anus or mouth.

Genital sores or milky fluids in the
genital area.

Nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear
of the dark or other sleeping
problems.

Extreme fear of "monsters."

Spacing out at odd times.

Loss of appetite, or trouble eating
or swallowing.

Sudden mood swings: rage, fear,
anger or withdrawal.

Fear of certain people or places
(for example, a child may not want
to be left alone with a baby sitter,
friend, relative or some other child
or adult; or a child who usually is
talkative and cheery may become
quiet and distant around a certain
person.

Stomach illness all the time with
no identifiable reason.

An older child behaving like a
younger child, exhibiting behavior
such as bed-wetting or thumb
sucking.

Sexual activities with toys or other
children, such as simulating sex
with dolls or asking other
children/siblings to behave
sexually.

New words for private body parts.

Refusing to talk about a "secret" he
or she has with an adult or older
child.

Talking about a new older friend.

Suddenly having money.

Cutting or burning herself or
himself as an adolescent.

*Source: Stop It Now, a
Massachusetts-based nonprofit
organization devoted to stopping
child sexual abuse*

*Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at
966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.*

Originally published October 12, 2005

Wife calls teen sex sting entrapment

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

By Nate Reens
The Grand Rapids Press

SPARTA -- The wife of a Sparta man accused of trying to lure a teenage girl to a sex rendezvous says police and the state attorney general's office are guilty of entrapping him during a two-week Internet sting.

George Vandenberg, 46, was jailed after authorities allege he traveled to Rockford to see someone he thought was a 14-year-old girl. He reportedly was chatting online with the "girl" between Sept. 26 and his arrest Monday. Authorities said he actually was exchanging messages with a state investigator.

"I'm dumbfounded and disappointed, but we believe it was entrapment, that they can't do this," Candace Vandenberg said. "We're trying to get him out so we can fight this. He means the world to me. It shouldn't have happened at all.

"It's not right what they said he did, but it's not right what the police did, either," she said. Rockford District Judge Steven Servaas on Tuesday arraigned George Vandenberg on felony charges of engaging in sexually abusive activity with a minor and using a computer to commit a crime. If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in prison.

Candace Vandenberg and her husband have been married 14 years. She was at work when George Vandenberg was arrested. He later called her from the Kent County Jail, where he is being held on a \$15,000 cash bond.

"He's a good man," she said. "He must have been lured into it because he's not that type of person."

Police records show no felony convictions against George Vandenberg.

Vandenberg is the third Grand Rapids-area man caught while allegedly trying to solicit sex from a person believed to be an underage girl. The person actually is a state investigator hired by Attorney General Mike Cox for his child-and-public-protection unit, which has arrested 74 sexual predators since 2003.

Last year, Allen Leroy Hoekstra, of Grand Rapids, and David Dean Replogle, of Kentwood, were arrested in similar stings. Each man has pleaded guilty to charges in their cases.

"Time and time again my office has protected our children by identifying and arresting dangerous sex predators and pornographers on the Internet," Cox said in a prepared statement.

State is No. 3 in life terms for kids

Change in juvenile sentencing urged

October 12, 2005

BY BEN SCHMITT
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Bobby Hines' mom doesn't dispute her boy was there when a friend of his killed a Detroit man in 1989, and she doesn't deny her 15-year-old son deserved prison time. But not life with no hope of parole.

"I think children should be given a second chance," said Gracie Hines, 57. "They can be rehabilitated, at least most of them can."

Bobby Hines, 31, was sentenced to life without parole before he was old enough to vote -- and a lot of prisoners in Michigan are in the same situation. According to a national study set to be released today by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, at least 306 state prison inmates fit that profile, giving Michigan more lifers who started their terms before age 18 than any state except for Pennsylvania (332) and Louisiana (317).

Michigan ranks high on the list for a number of reasons. First, it's one of only 11 states that considers offenders age 17 and older as adults. Second, Michigan prosecutors can opt to charge any juvenile 14 years of age or older as an adult without any appearances in juvenile court. Finally, the state's mandatory sentence of life without parole for anyone convicted of first-degree murder plays a role, meaning that prosecutors who go after someone as an adult and win a conviction essentially guarantee he or she will remain in prison for life. The judge has no flexibility in sentencing.

"Once a youth offender is convicted of a serious crime such as first-degree murder in states like Michigan, there's no turning back," said Alison Parker, a researcher for Human Rights Watch in New York who authored the study. "The judge's hands are tied."

Eliminating life without parole

Parker's report shows that juvenile crime skyrocketed in the early- to mid-1990s. In response, states passed stricter laws against juveniles committing serious crimes.

Now, however, juvenile crime is down, but there are 2,225 criminal offenders nationwide who were sentenced when they were under 18 years of age who are serving life without parole.

Michigan's rate of sentencing youth to life without parole is 49.3 per 100,000 youths age 14-17, which is three times higher than the national average of 14.2. Virginia leads the nation with a rate of 132.9, the study said.

"We need to eliminate this sentence of life without parole for juveniles," said Ann Arbor lawyer Deborah LaBelle, who works closely with the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union. "We shouldn't take a child and throw away the key and never look at them again."

Life without parole
The following
Michigan counties
have the highest
number of
offenders who
were under the
age of 18 when
they were
sentenced to life
without parole
(through 2003):

1. Wayne...123
2. Oakland...40
3. Genesee...25
4. Saginaw...20
5. Kent...18
6. Berrien...10
7. Calhoun...8
- (tie) Macomb...8
9. Muskegon...7
10. Washtenaw...6
- (tie) Kalamazoo...6

Source: American
Civil Liberties
Union in Michigan

Although prosecutors can take a child offender to juvenile court and even have the option of pursuing a blended sentence -- through which the offender could be moved to an adult facility after reaching age 18 -- critics say prosecutors are too eager to charge teen offenders as adults. "Our basic recommendation is to eliminate life without parole for any individual under 18," said Parker. "That doesn't mean that someone who commits a serious crime should not be punished; it means that at some point during incarceration they should have a parole hearing to see if they have or have not rehabilitated themselves."

The only way out

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III says the organizations that authored the study have it all wrong. In fact, he said, they're not even asking the right question.

"They are asking why do we have 300 kids serving life without parole when they should be asking, why do we have 300 kids in Michigan who are murderers and how did they get that way?" Dunnings said. "They are asking the wrong question."

Dunnings, a past president of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, said a review process is in place for inmates sentenced to life without parole: The governor can commute life sentences if he or she chooses to do so.

State Rep. William VanRegenmorter, R-Georgetown Township, agreed.

"If anyone has a strong feeling that justice is improved by changing a given sentence, we have the mechanism in place," said VanRegenmorter, who was a state senator on the Senate Judiciary Committee when it helped write several tougher juvenile justice laws in the mid-1990s. "I think that's enough."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has commuted five sentences, all for medical reasons, since she took office in 2003, a spokeswoman said.

Dunnings pointed out that many of the people sentenced as teens to life sentences claim not to be central figures in the crimes for which they were convicted.

"In those accomplice-type cases, I would bet you dimes against doughnuts that those kids got a plea offer and turned it down," Dunnings said. "They wanted to roll the dice."

Family holds out hope

That was the case with Bobby Hines. Prosecutors offered him a plea deal for second-degree murder, which carries a life sentence, too -- only it has the possibility of parole. He and his family rejected it, believing that because he wasn't the shooter, he would be acquitted.

Even life with parole seemed too long to them.

"One of the things I say of those prosecutors is that they offered a lot of the same things we are asking for now," LaBelle said. "It's not like they thought they were so dangerous that they couldn't offer them this very opportunity at parole."

The 16-year-old who pulled the trigger pleaded guilty to second-degree murder. Bobby Hines didn't. Because he was charged as an adult and convicted of first-degree murder by a Wayne County jury, his sentence was predetermined: He will spend the rest of his life in prison unless the governor commutes his sentence.

Hines is at the Kinross Correctional Facility in the Upper Peninsula. He received his general equivalency diploma in prison. He spends most of his time working on leather crafts, such as belts, that he sends home.

"He's 31 now. I'm not sure how he survived, but he made it," Gracie Hines said. "I think it's time for them to let him out. He's still got a chance for a life. We're holding out hope."

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-223-4296 or schmitt@freepress.com.

Charles in charge at youth home

Despite troubled track record of facility, new director has praise for staff

PUBLISHED: October 12, 2005

By Chad Selweski
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Charles Seidelman learned one thing quickly after taking over the reins of Macomb County's beleaguered youth home -- he's not in Paducah anymore.

In Kentucky, Seidelman directed a juvenile detention facility in a rural area where all programs and policies were dictated by state government. At the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center, he is overseeing a large facility with a troubled past where day-to-day operations are in his hands.

"Here, very clearly, I'm responsible for the success or failure of a facility," said Seidelman, 55, in his first interview since assuming the post.

In his seventh week on the job, Seidelman has settled into a post that some might label the toughest in Macomb County government. He is taking the helm of a relatively new 80-bed, 81,000-square-foot detention center on the outskirts of Mount Clemens.

He is overseeing the reconstruction of the adjacent former Youth Home, a second expansion project that is nearly a year behind schedule. And he is inheriting a facility that was hit with a series of state reprimands over a 9-month period that caused the center to temporarily lose its license.

Yet, Seidelman said he's seen no evidence of the dysfunctional, even brutal, staff that was portrayed by state regulators who repeatedly cited the facility for abuse or neglect of the teens housed there.

"The staff is engaged with the kids. They want to know what they can do better. I don't think a new director could ask for more," he said.

"A welcome greeting for me is easy. What really impresses me is the people who came to me with ideas. They're can-do people."

A 28-year veteran in the juvenile justice field, Seidelman is pleased with the recent creation of a 15-member advisory committee to scrutinize the facility, but he saves his warmest compliments for the Juvenile Court probation officers who try to steer offenders away from a life of delinquency or crime.

"They're one of the finest professional organizations I've seen," he said.

Seidelman landed the job after a year-long hiring process plagued by missteps and accusations of favoritism, even racism. He replaces Ronald Gekiere, the longtime youth home director who retired after a May 2004 shakeup at the facility.

The contentious effort to replace Gekiere led to an anxiety-ridden bid by the county Board of Commissioners to put a top-notch candidate in charge, including a decision to boost the

maximum salary for the post to \$86,000. Two rounds of applicant interviews by commissioners led to two subsequent choices for the post, only to see both turn it down.

Seidelman was never rated as anything but well qualified, but he admits he had misgivings when he applied for the job because of the youth home's checkered past.

"I had a lot of concerns. I talked with a lot of associates and they thought it was problematic," he recalled.

But when he talked with interim director Bob Slaine, his worries faded and he now sounds like a man with no regrets. Officials say he has made a major presence in his first weeks on the job, sounding out workers and making procedural changes.

"He's a take-charge guy. He came right in and started doing the job -- without a lot of help," said county board Chairwoman Nancy White. "I think we've got a good one here."

Seidelman had served seven years as director of a regional detention center director in Paducah that served 18 Kentucky counties. Prior to that he served seven years as a facility director in Indiana and 12 years as a probation officer and youth home chief in western Michigan, at Ottawa County's facility in Grand Haven.

In Macomb County, he runs a facility with up to 80 juveniles who are in detention for offenses ranging from violent felonies to chronic truancy. The center is overseen by 83 staffers, including 64 child care workers. When the renovation of the adjacent building is complete, the overall complex will have 19 detention units capable of holding 190 kids.

Nostalgia aside, Seidelman said that his business has changed very little since he began serving as a child protective services worker in south Florida in the 1970s. Juvenile offenders haven't necessarily become more violent, he said, "there's just more of them and they're certainly better-armed."

Just prior to Seidelman's arrival here in late August, a series of reforms were put into place by a study committee that in 2004 had found a disturbing degree of mismanagement at the youth home.

Seidelman is quietly building on those changes by revising work schedules, daily work routines and hiring practices. He's also working with outside agencies, including the Macomb County Library, which will update the reading materials available for the Juvenile Justice Center residents.

But he's not reviewing past chapters in the detention center's history. Seidelman said the mistakes of 2003-04 have been corrected and it's time to look forward, to 2006 and beyond.

"I've not looked backwards at all in taking on this job," he said. "Nancy White said to me that it's important to have a fresh set of eyes coming in to take over. I think that's right."

Program seeks volunteers

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Volunteers who speak Spanish are needed to work with children and families enrolled in the Head Start program.

The volunteers would work one-on-one with preschoolers in the classroom.

For more information or to obtain a volunteer application packet, call Kristin Klug at 784-4800.

Housing agent accused of embezzling

Officials say woman defrauded state of more than \$1 million

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

BY AMALIE NASH
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Federal authorities have accused a Washtenaw County registered housing agent with defrauding the state of more than \$1 million in funds designed to assist low-income residents with housing. Documents recently unsealed by federal agents charge that LaToya Cotton falsely created eligible clients to receive the state funding, which was instead paid to a company Cotton founded herself. As a housing choice voucher agent for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority in Washtenaw County, Cotton was responsible for signing up and administering candidates for programs like Section 8 housing.

Cotton's downtown Ypsilanti office was raided by federal agents Sept. 13, and MSHDA officials said her ties to the agency were severed that day. She had been a housing agent for at least 11 years.

Cotton's attorney, Timothy McDaniel of Ann Arbor, said he had seen a copy of the search warrant affidavit but was still gathering information about the investigation.

"We're moving as quickly as we can to review everything carefully," McDaniel said Tuesday.

"These are all allegations, and nothing has been proven."

Cotton has not been charged with a crime and couldn't be reached for comment.

According to federal documents, a probe into Cotton's work with the agency was launched last March after MSHDA learned that a client living in a residence owned by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission had been unable to secure housing subsidy payments. The reason the client was deemed not eligible was that records showed the person was already receiving Section 8 vouchers sent to a company called Washtenaw Payee Services, the documents said.

Washtenaw Payee Services is not a registered business in the county, but federal agents learned that Cotton filed business papers and opened an account under that name with a local bank in 1990. Investigators said Cotton's company was receiving funds for about 30 people, and more than \$1 million was funneled into that account over the last 11 years for housing payments. The individuals named in the paperwork do exist, but none has received any benefit from the voucher payments and none is associated with Washtenaw Payee Services, the documents allege. Paperwork showed Cotton enrolled the individuals in the program, provided verification and inspection documents of their residences and identified Washtenaw Payee Services as the entity to send the rental assistance payments, documents said.

The state's Section 8 voucher program has a waiting list, and recipients are chosen at random.

"There are only a finite number of people who can receive the vouchers, and if what alleged is proven to be true, that deprived legitimate Section 8 recipients from help," FBI Senior Agent Greg Stejskal said. "It's Robin Hood in reverse."

Stejskal, of the Ann Arbor office, said he could not discuss any aspects of the ongoing investigation. The documents accuse Cotton, 45, of violations under the federal public corruption act.

"We were able to establish sufficient probable cause to conduct a search of the business," Stejskal said.

A federal lien also was placed on Cotton's Canton Township home, preventing her from selling the residence she purchased in 2004 because of the investigation, documents show. Cotton is listed in Canton Township records as the owner of a 5,237-square-foot home built by Valley Ridge Properties in 2003. Property records show she purchased it in April 2004 for \$830,000. McDaniel said he is working with the different departments involved, including forfeiture, to reach a compromise to get the lien off the property.

Clarence Stone of MSHDA's legal affairs section said Tuesday that he could not comment on the probe at this point. Documents said Cotton, owner of LC Cotton LLC, was responsible for more than 400 client vouchers in Washtenaw County. Stone said those cases currently are being re-assigned to other housing agents.

In the weeks after Cotton's contract with the state was terminated, many of Cotton's clients remained in limbo.

Jodie Perry of Scio Township, who has received state aid through Cotton for seven years, said she was nearly evicted from her apartment when Cotton failed to pay the state portion of her rent for two months. Perry had been trying to contact Cotton to resolve the problem when she read in The News about Cotton's legal problems.

"I was just about to get evicted and had to go to court and everything after I had already paid my portion of the rent, but she didn't pay their portion," Perry said. "Now I have no idea if what I was paying was the right amount, and the state said they didn't have my file, that the FBI had it." After several stressful days of talking to everyone she could reach, Perry was referred to a new case agent who was able to get emergency funds issued. The apartment complex has yet to receive a check, but Perry - along with her four children and grandchild - have been allowed to stay as the issues are worked out.

"Things are going better, and I don't think I'm going to get put out," Perry said.

Any of Cotton's former clients or others trying to reach MSHDA should call the Detroit office at (313) 456-3620.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6832.

A Harvest of Generosity

Jews Observe High Holidays by Giving Food to Those in Need

By Debbi Wilgoren
Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, October 12, 2005; Page B01

The big white truck from the Capital Area Food Bank will be parked outside a Silver Spring high school tonight and tomorrow, slowly filling with bags of groceries brought by Jewish worshipers on their holiest day of the year.

On Sunday, the truck was at Temple Sinai in Northwest Washington, where hundreds of Jewish families offered piles of pasta, peanut butter and other nonperishables to stock the shelves of those in need. Later this month, the truck will head to B'nai Shalom of Olney, to pick up another 1,700 or so pounds of donated goods.

For many Jews, collecting food for the needy has become an important part of observing the High Holidays, a 10-day period of reflection and repentance that began last week with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and will conclude with the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, which begins this evening and ends tomorrow at nightfall.

Some area congregations hand out grocery bags on Rosh Hashanah and ask worshipers to fill and return them by Yom Kippur, a holiday of fasting and prayer spent mostly in the synagogue. Others collect food from parents dropping their youngsters off at Sunday morning religious school or accept donations throughout the weeklong holiday of Sukkot, which this year starts Oct. 17.

The food that is collected is distributed to needy families by the food bank's 700 partner organizations: soup kitchens, food pantries, day-care centers, senior centers and after-school programs, to name a few.

Many synagogues also encourage congregants to donate money to Mazon, a Jewish anti-hunger group.

From the pulpit, rabbis preach about the importance of charity in connection with Yom Kippur, in addition to abstaining from food and drink, seeking forgiveness for wrongdoing and asking God for health and sustenance in the year ahead.

"Not only are we doing the introspection that the holiday demands of us, not only are we atoning for the sins of the last year, but one way that we can make amends is by recommitting ourselves to improving the world around us," said Rabbi Fred Reiner of Temple Sinai, which combines its food collection with a walk to support efforts to end homelessness.

He and others involved with the food drives said they offer meaningful symbolism for both Yom Kippur and the upcoming festival of Sukkot, a harvest celebration that also commemorates the Biblical years of wandering in the desert and dwelling in temporary huts.

"This is an opportunity to help those who are always hungry, on the day and in the season that we are hungry," said Adam Zeren, youth director at B'nai Shalom, which began participating in the food drives last year. "Also, as we are gathering in our harvest season, it's our opportunity to harvest some food for those in need."

Although charitable giving, or *tzedakah*, is emphasized throughout Jewish tradition, the specific practice of donating food on the High Holidays is a fairly modern innovation that has been embraced mostly by Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist congregations.

Orthodox synagogues and schools tend to collect food for the poor in the spring, before Passover, a time when observant Jews empty their homes of bread and other leavened foods. Jewish law explicitly requires giving to the poor just before Passover and on the high-spirited holiday of Purim, which usually falls in February or March.

But those who are filling grocery bags this time of year say the effort fits with the more sacred aspects of the holiday, helping them to connect the spiritual with the practical.

Rabbi Marc D. Israel, education director at Ohr Kodesh Congregation in Chevy Chase, noted that the Yom Kippur liturgy lists charity as one of three main paths -- along with prayer and repentance -- to divine pardon.

"Sure, it's secular, but it is part of how you think about starting off the new year and becoming a better person," said Monica Gourovitch of Bethesda, who dropped off food at Temple Sinai with her husband and 5-year-old twin boys.

More than two tons of food has been collected on Yom Kippur each of the past five years through *Am Yisrael*, an organization that offers High Holiday services in the auditorium of John F. Kennedy High School in Silver Spring. Rabbi Bob Sacks, who leads the worship services for as many as 800 people, said volunteers from a Boy Scout troop ferry grocery bags to the truck. At Temple Sinai on Sunday, congregants filled collection bins throughout the morning, piling bags of organic rice and pasta from Whole Foods Market atop canned goods from Safeway and healthy cereals and snacks from Trader Joe's.

"Part of what it means to be Jewish is to be connected with the community and to serve the community," said Victoria Bor of Chevy Chase, a member of the synagogue's social action committee. "It's part of our moral obligation."

October 11, 2005

Living wage idea not dead yet

Commissioners discuss topic

By VANESSA McCRAY

Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - An idea to create a living wage ordinance in the city still has life. Local attorney Paul Bare in June asked the city commission to pass an ordinance that requires companies that do business with the city to pay their employees an hourly rate of at least \$9.30. The discussion was put on hold four months ago for city employee review. Monday, city commissioners tackled the topic again.

City treasurer William Twietmeyer threw out a number of possible problems with the ordinance, including its limited impact in a small town and additional staff needed to monitor the rate rule.

"I don't think we should be in the business of setting wages," said commissioner Ralph Soffredine. "I think that's up to the market."

But commissioners said they were interested in learning more about the proposal.

Bare described it as "simply using the contractual power of Traverse City to promote a goal the city feels is worthwhile."

The wage ordinance would apply to employers who provide legal, accounting, construction and other services to the city.

It would require those businesses to pay employees at least \$9.30, a rate based on current federal poverty guidelines.

The plan calls for employers to pay more if they don't provide medical insurance.

Commissioner Anne Melichar said the hourly rate isn't "an extravagant amount."

Companies that do business with the city may already pay living wages, she said.

Bare said he would research the impact of such ordinances in similarly sized cities and report to the commission his findings.

Sen. Goschka's slice of heaven

The Saginaw News

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

State Sen. Mike Goschka has worn his religious faith on his sleeve as long as he's revolved in Lansing politics. So it was no surprise the Saginaw County Republican supported a resolution last week asking the state Supreme Court to intervene in a lower court ruling allowing the state to extend health-care benefits to gay and lesbian couples. His response to constituents on the divisive issue, however, was inflammatory and condemnable.

"Simply put, no homosexual or lesbian union is ever appropriate," Goschka responded to more than one constituent. Further punctuating his view, he added: "Rather, it is utter perversity." Later, when a gay rights group asked for an apology, the senator refused and retorted: "They should apologize for their lifestyle and tolerating something so terrible."

Goschka's faith and its tenets, as he understands them, are his own to hold. But Christian denominations and individual Christians, undoubtedly many who consider themselves as committed to their faith as the senator, are divided on the issue of gay rights and same-sex unions.

Goschka's response vilified, condemned and attempted to silence gays and their supporters. Expressing opposition to state-paid benefits for same-sex couples is one thing; characterizing it as "perversity" and decrying tolerance for gays and lesbians as "terrible" aren't going to further the debate.

He also holds an extremely limited definition of a family. He told the Saginaw Valley State University employee that he believed a "legitimate family, as ordained by God, can only exist between a man and a woman within the context of marriage."

Would that make single-parent families illegitimate? Are non-custodial parents who remain active in their children's lives wrong to consider themselves part of a family? Apparently, under Goschka's definition.

In a response to a reporter's question, Sen. Goschka attempted to frame his opposition to state benefits for gays in clearer policy terms, not strictly as an outcropping of his personal religious belief. Discussing it as a legal question and a matter of state policy would have been appropriate. Yet even in that context Goschka failed, essentially saying it was appropriate for the state to discriminate against gay couples by not providing benefits on religious grounds. That intolerance by a state lawmaker only makes it easier for others to justify discrimination against gays and lesbians. Goschka is also disingenuous in invoking his tolerance by saying he's had gays work for him. "Not a lot," Goschka said. "But I don't ask." How does he know then?

Compare Goschka's response to that of Sen. Jim Barcia of Bay City, who also voted in favor of the resolution. Barcia said he was more concerned about resolving the legal questions surrounding the issue.

"I'm not a gay-bashing legislator," Barcia said, in a more tempered response.

Goschka, however, has no problem bashing or punishing a group of people who don't ascribe to his religious beliefs.

U-Va. reaches out to low-income families

■ Scholarships based on need are introduced to counter growing rift between rich and poor.

BY SUSAN KINZIE
Washington Post

10/12

WASHINGTON — Things were all right until Reggie White's grandfather moved away, leaving the 16-year-old and his grandmother to get by on her retirement money and his after-school job at Hardee's.

Then she started forgetting things, getting confused, losing checks. By the time a doctor told them she had Alzheimer's disease, White said, he had been taking care of her for months in their weary old house in western Virginia.

Sometimes the lights went out when the bills weren't paid. Sometimes dinner cooked by a friend or a bag of groceries dropped off was all they had. White kept having to miss high school to take care of her, and if there was one thing his grandmother always told him, it was to study. To go to college.

This school year, he started classes at the University of Virginia on a full scholarship, part of a push by the school to increase the number of low-income students there.



Gerald Martineau / Washington Post

Reggie White uses a photo of himself at age 5 with the grandmother who raised him, Jean Jones, as a screen saver at the University of Virginia.

Over the years, the number of poor families sending their children to U-Va. has dropped steadily, part of a national trend. A 2003 study found that less than 9 percent of U-Va.'s students got Pell grants, a measure of family income. The national average for four-year institutions was 20 percent.

The proportion of wealthy students seemed to be rising in recent years, too: In 1993, about 10 percent of U-Va. freshmen who filled out surveys estimated their parents' in-

come was \$200,000 or more. By last year, that figure had jumped to nearly 22 percent.

To turn the situation around,

university President John Casteen led an effort to design generous need-based scholarships, such as the one White was given, and other aid; this year, funding for the program was increased to more than \$20 million annually, and nearly 800 entering freshman will benefit.

A national study of elite colleges found that most students come from families in the top quarter of incomes and only a small percentage come from the bottom quarter. It's an especially embarrassing problem for state flagship schools, which were founded to provide opportunity to everyone.

The trend started at Harvard University and has spread to several public universities in the past few years. AccessUVa guarantees that any student whose parents earn up to about \$38,000 supporting a family of four gets tuition, room and board, books and fees covered.

Disaster relief diverts aid for local people

October 12, 2005

BY CECILIA OLECK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

While metro Detroiters dig into their wallets to help survivors of natural disasters around the world, area agencies serving the needy are hoping those closer to home won't be overlooked.

The string of catastrophes in places such as Thailand, New Orleans and Pakistan, coupled with a sluggish state economy, is leaving charities and nonprofits to do more work with fewer resources.

While there's no overall data on how much money, food and clothing has been diverted to other parts of the country and world in the past year, local agencies say the effects are clear.

The Salvation Army Eastern Michigan Division, for example, said \$2.7 million given from its consistent donors -- money normally relied on to fund local causes -- has been designated to help tsunami and hurricane relief efforts instead, said Russ Russell, the organization's executive director of development.

"We're having our own tsunami, our own hurricane every day in southeastern Michigan," he said. "We're concerned."

Since last year, the Salvation Army has seen local need for its services increase about 20%, Russell said.

The organization now provides shelter for about 1,600 people in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties each night and meals for about 7,000 people each day, and expects those numbers to rise as winter sets in, Russell said.

And though area agency leaders said they don't begrudge the victims of natural disasters for the attention focused on their plights -- many local agencies are involved with relief efforts -- they have to take care of the day-to-day, too.

The upcoming holiday season complicates the matter as agencies wait to see whether local donors will have anything left to give.

"Right now, it's really going to be difficult," said Emily Nadeau, executive director of Lighthouse Emergency Services in Oakland County, which assists low-income residents. "We're really asking people to dig deep. I just don't want them to forget that there are poor among us."

The YWCA of Western Wayne County noticed the impact of donors diverting money elsewhere while seeking out corporate sponsors for its upcoming Women of Achievement luncheon later this month, said Karen Murphy, chief executive officer of the organization.

"They're very honest," Murphy said. "They say 'We're tapped out.' They feel bad to tell us that, but they're also encouraging us" that next year will be better.

More than 29,000 people are homeless in the state; families make up 40%-50% of that figure.

In July, August and September, 6 million meals were given to people in need in Oakland, Macomb, Wayne, Livingston, Washtenaw and Monroe counties.

Sources: Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness; Gleaners Community Food Bank

HOW TO HELP

Agencies that serve those in need in southeast Michigan are bracing for a lean year, with much of the money, food and clothing that normally would go to local people being diverted to help disaster relief efforts worldwide.

Here's how to contact some of the agencies that serve metro Detroit.

Food Bank Council of Michigan:

www.fbcmich.orgcqco; 800-552-4483, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

Lighthouse

Emergency Services: www.lighthouseoakland.comcqco; 248-920-6100, anytime.

Salvation Army Eastern Michigan Division:

www.salvationarmymich.orgcqco; 248-443-5500, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan:

www.uwcs.orgcqco; 313-226-9200, ext. 300, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

YWCA of Western Wayne County:

www.ywca-wwc.orgcqco; 313-561-4110, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

If there is a bright spot, Nadeau said, it is that the disasters are prompting donations from people who might not have otherwise given to charitable efforts.

If local agencies can tap those people in the future, the long-term impact of the disasters won't be felt as much by the needy in the area, she said.

"We help people with disasters every day -- from house fires to financial disasters to domestic problems," said Jane Marshall, executive director and chief executive officer of the Food Bank Council of Michigan. "It's a little disheartening because we do this kind of work every day. I think people forget how many impoverished people there are in our own cities."

Contact CECILIA OLECK at 248-351-3692 or oleck@freepress.com.

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Help for Katrina evacuees dwindles Aid agencies start to think about resettlement for Gulf Coast residents who fled to Metro area after storm hit.

By Joe Menard / The Detroit News

SOUTHFIELD -- More than 1,000 evacuees who have relocated to southeast Michigan should start thinking about more permanent housing, officials said at a meeting Tuesday of aid agencies. "We really have moved from the emergency response to the resettlement," said Mike Brennan, president and CEO for the United Way of Southeast Michigan, which hosted the meeting. Dozens of aid agencies, nonprofits and faith-based groups met at the Southfield library to discuss the next phase of assistance for evacuees who fled to Metro Detroit in the weeks following Hurricane Katrina's landfall Aug. 29.

The meeting came at a time when public resources for the evacuees are beginning to dwindle. The Oakland County Department of Human Services' evacuee reception center at the Welcome Missionary Baptist Church in Pontiac will close Friday. Its adult medical assistance application period has already closed and benefits for food assistance will cease at year-end.

Wayne County is considering scaling back its reception operations at Detroit City Airport.

"I don't know how much longer we'll be able to give evacuees specifically the amount of support we've been giving them," said Margaret Warner, director of the Oakland County human services department.

As evacuees have moved out of shelters and churches and into the homes of friends, relatives and samaritans, they must decide whether they're going to return to the Gulf Coast or try to start a new life here.

If they decide to leave, the Salvation Army will arrange for their transportation at no cost.

But if they decide to stay, they should begin making plans before the holidays.

"More are living with friends and others than (in) hotels" such as the Ramada Inn in Southfield," Warner said. "Come December, folks are going to wear out their welcome."

County human services departments have already identified more than 35,000 housing opportunities ranging from high-end rentals to free faith-based housing.

"There is a resettlement issue that is in front of us," said John Ziraldo of Lighthouse of Oakland County. "This next transition period is really a phase for people to figure out what they're going to do with their lives."

You can reach Joe Menard at (248) 647-7429 or jmenard@detnews.com.

Agency Still Fails New Jersey Youth, Report Says

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES and TINA KELLEY
The New York Times

Published: October 12, 2005

TRENTON, Oct. 11 - Two years after New Jersey embarked on an ambitious plan to improve its troubled child welfare system, the state is still failing to provide the most basic services. Workers are not monitoring children regularly. Children have failed to receive regular checkups or have their medical records updated. And the efficiency of the adoption process, a problem that other child welfare systems have addressed to great success, is still lagging, leaving children to languish in foster-care limbo.

The findings were among those in a report by an independent panel charged with monitoring the court-ordered overhaul of New Jersey's child welfare agency, the Division of Youth and Family Services. The long-awaited report, which was released on Tuesday, found that the state has largely failed at putting key measures in place to fix the overburdened system and keep children safe.

Citing the report, lawyers representing foster children in a class-action lawsuit against the state asked a federal judge to intervene in the reform effort, setting the stage for a possible court takeover of the system. The state and the panel have 10 days to try to forge an agreement to forestall a takeover.

The panel found that New Jersey officials have not met the most critical terms of an agreement that settled a lawsuit against the system in 2003. In a federal court hearing in Trenton where the report was released, lawyers for Children's Rights Inc., the Manhattan advocacy group that settled the suit with the state, said the group had lost faith in New Jersey's ability to repair the broken system.

"The children deserve more than they have gotten," Susan Lambiase, associate director of Children's Rights, said in court. "A lot of time and money has been spent. The state is unable to do the job the children need and deserve without a major course correction that just hasn't come." The report was the second of three periodic evaluations of the state's efforts to revamp its child welfare agency. In the two years since agreeing to sweeping changes, the state has poured more than \$300 million into the effort.

Throughout the 89-page report, members of the panel go to great pains to detail the modest but measurable ways in which the system has improved, including the hiring of 600 caseworkers and the end of the longstanding practice of warehousing mentally ill foster children in detention centers.

But in other areas, like eliminating excessive worker caseloads and putting new training techniques in place, the report concluded that the state's performance has been lacking. The panel found that the state had made "seriously inadequate progress" in 14 key areas, taking no action in addressing some problems while doing too little to resolve others.

"As a result," the panel wrote, "the overall progress of the reform effort is considerably less than the court and the citizens of New Jersey could reasonably have expected."

Of 909 children placed with foster families from April to June of this year, only 260 - or 29 percent - of those who should have received medical exams did so, the panel found.

That figure was particularly alarming in light of the case of the Jackson siblings, four adopted brothers who two years ago were found to have been starved for 13 years. The boys were supposed to be monitored by the state and yet none had made regular doctor's visits. This month, the state settled a lawsuit filed on the boys' behalf for \$12.5 million.

"One of the areas that I'm most concerned about is the fact that there remains an insufficient safety net for children with health care needs in this system," said Kevin M. Ryan, the state's child advocate." He added, "It remains possible today that there are children in the child protection system whose imminent medical needs are not being addressed."

The panel also pointed to the slowness of adoption as a problem. When it comes to placing children in adoptive homes, the state actually did a worse job in June 2005 than it did in January, according to the report.

"New Jersey's ability to 'provide timely, specialized, high-quality adoption services' has decreased rather than improved during this monitoring period," the panel wrote.

In court on Tuesday, James M. Davy, commissioner of the state's Department of Human Services, which oversees the child welfare agency, argued that there were no grounds for court intervention. While Mr. Davy acknowledged that the system was still far short of its goals, he said that the state had done all it could to meet the standards established in the settlement agreement by the interim deadlines.

"I am not going to tell you that the child welfare system in New Jersey is fixed," he told Judge Stanley R. Chesler, before adding that officials remained committed to reform.

Aides to Acting Gov. Richard J. Codey said that while he was still reviewing the panel's findings, the state remained dedicated to overhauling the system. "And getting results," said Kelley Heck, a spokeswoman for Mr. Codey.

Ms. Lambiase's request set in motion a series of steps that could lead to the agency being placed in receivership. Under the terms of the settlement agreement, both Children's Rights and the state will engage in 10 days of mediation which will be administered by the panel that released Tuesday's report.

"We'll figure out if we can reach agreement about significant course corrections, and if we can't, we will go to the court for enforcement," Ms. Lambiase said in a telephone interview after Tuesday's hearing. "There are lots of possible remedies. The most drastic would be receivership, which we haven't ruled out."

Other possibilities, she said, included the state appointing experts to address areas of particular concern or elevating child welfare to a separate cabinet-level agency in the hierarchy of state government.

During Tuesday morning's hearing, Judge Chesler said that the state had reached "a critical point in this reform plan." He said that arguing the case in court would mean that two years of hard work and taxpayers' money would have been wasted.

"If we get to the point where, in fact, we are litigating this reform plan, what I will tell you ladies and gentlemen is that you will have failed," he said. "If I have to reach that point, I will."

Judge Chesler said that he believed the report left room for the state to fulfill its pledge to make reforms. He said he looked forward to the panel's third and final report in December, after which the state - which has had a contentious relationship with the panel in recent months - will ask that the group be disbanded and a single monitor be appointed. The panel was formed shortly after the 2003 settlement and has been monitoring the state's progress for about a year.

"The report does not challenge the commitment of the commissioner or the department to achieving reform," he said. "It does not brand the reform effort as a total failure."

The panel was sharply critical of the system's leaders, saying they have not done a consistent job of helping front-line workers understand the most basic components of the reform effort. Last month, Edward E. Cotton, the division's leader, announced his resignation.

"The panel came down hard in its report about leadership and organizational issues that seem to be completely undermining the reform effort," said Ms. Lambiase. "And we don't want this effort to be wasted. We think the job can get done, but the clock is ticking, and time is running out."